



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life.

Amen

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Are you someone who sees pursuing unity or embracing difference as more important? Why do you think this is?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to God's people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,

Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.

Amen

Psalm of the Week – Psalm 82

God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods, he holds judgement:
**'How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?**
Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.'

**They have neither knowledge nor understanding,
they walk around in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.**

I say, 'You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you;
nevertheless, you shall die like mortals,
and fall like any prince.'

**Rise up, O God, judge the earth;
for all the nations belong to you!**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.
Amen

Prayers of Renewal

You're invited to take quiet time to bring your prayers of confession and renewal to God. After this, the following prayer may be said:

God of judgement and mercy,
thank you that you help us to see ourselves honestly,
forgive us our mistakes and faults,
heal our wounds and comfort us in trouble.
In Jesus's name, and in the power of the Holy Spirit,
we pray. **Amen**

Reading Luke 12:49 – 56

Sermon

I wonder if you have ever faced rejection in some form, by members of your family or by friends, because of your Christian faith? Having been accepted by the Methodist Church to enter training to become a minister, I remember all too well how my dad found this impossible to understand at that time; he couldn't get his head around why one would choose to give up a secure and well-paid job to pursue a path with far less in the way of material benefit. Added to this, it unsettled me to see how the way some of my colleagues behaved around me changed. For example, one guy kept on telling others that they must not swear in front of me, because I was going to become a minister, and so would be offended by their language. Needless to say, I was relieved when things returned to normal, and my friends felt relaxed in my company once again! More happily, it was a very unexpected but joyful surprise when – four years after reacting with such hostility to my sense of vocation – my dad asked me if he could come to my ordination service.

Now, while my story has a happy ending, when conflict and division arises from hostile reactions to one's faith, things do not always find

a neat resolution. Perhaps you've been pushed away by somebody after telling them that you are a Christian; I have met folks who have assumed that I would be judgemental and narrow-minded, because I have a faith, and breaking those barriers down takes effort. Maybe you have been given a hard time by somebody for going against the grain, and standing up for justice and the value of all people in God's eyes. Possibly, you have tried to share the difference your Christian faith has made to your life, and been ignored or mocked by the other person. Discipleship is not, and never has been, without its costs.

Today's passage from Luke's Gospel centres around three themes, each of what illuminates an aspect of discipleship – being refined in the fire by God and subjected to divine judgement, the divisive form the Gospel sometimes takes, and the need to learn to read the signs of the times. It follows from some difficult teaching about obedience, and how lack of fidelity is met with a lack of grace (12:35 – 48). This reflects the urgency of the journey Jesus was making, as he headed from Galilee towards Jerusalem and to the cross, and continues into today's passage. The first theme picks up upon imagery used within Hebrew texts such as Jeremiah 23:9 or Malachi 3:1 – 4, and speaks of the refiner's fire through which God purifies and cleanses, as well as the purifying and cleansing waters of baptism. If we are to enable God to refine us, which is a painful but necessary process, we must learn to face ourselves with honesty. The second theme reminds us that Jesus' message was never going to be accepted by everybody, and we will sometimes have to deal with rejection. This calls for real courage to keep going in the face of negativity, especially if it comes from those closest to us (12:51 – 53). The third and final theme gets cast in the text as reading the signs of the times, which we can think of in terms of openness to God's work in the world (12:54 – 56).

Weaving the three strands – honesty, courage and openness – into one thread of committed discipleship requires a framework in which to make sense of our journeys and questions. One such scaffolding

comes courtesy of the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann and his classic text *The Prophetic Imagination*. He views the task of prophets as the call to “nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to [the worldview] of the dominant culture around us”, which he says is both “grossly uncritical” and “wearied”. In other words, prophets are all about cultivating a radically different way of being centred upon justice and compassion and the freedom of God’s liberating love. While the dominant powers insist there can be no new beginnings, the prophetic imagination cultivates renewal leading to societal transformation. It takes stories like many of those who came to Jesus throughout the New Testament, and turns them into re-envisioned narratives of lives changed, priorities altered, and hope unleashed through solidarity across various divides.

Our three qualities of honesty, courage, and openness are therefore essential, if we are to undertake this transformational work. Honesty about ourselves and the world we share enables us to see reality more clearly, and thus to be changed by what we discover as God refines us. Courage is clearly necessary to challenge the dominant powers, and to hold up a mirror to our society, so that what we frequently do not wish to see cannot be ignored. Openness to what the Holy Spirit is up to in the world, and hence reading the signs of the times, keeps us alert to the new possibilities, and fires our imaginations. Prophets need to weave these three qualities together to proclaim that God’s Kingdom has come near, whether our audience proves itself hostile or receptive (10:9 – 11). It goes without saying that none of this stuff is easy or without cost, and if we are to sustain this kind of prophetic expression of discipleship, we need to ground ourselves in the joyful promise which is the pivot point of Luke 12. In 12:32, Jesus tells his listeners not to be afraid, because it is God’s good pleasure – God’s plan, intention and desire – to give us the Kingdom.

Additionally, we are not the first generation of disciples to face these challenges. We know that Luke’s community faced many obstacles in living under Roman oppression and amidst increasingly fractious relationships between synagogues and churches. Keeping honest, courageous and open in this environment was costly. Yet, they held to the promise in 12:32 that God freely gives the life of the Kingdom, and this enabled them to not simply survive, but to thrive. Like them, we will face difficult situations and seasons, especially in the current chaotic climate. We may face rejection and hostilities along the way. We will have to face difficult truths about ourselves. We will need to get better at discerning the signs of the times. However, as was the case with Luke’s fragile community, God intends, desires and plans to give us the Kingdom, and that gives us a firm foundation on which to build. Hence, as we look towards the future, may we step forward boldly, with honesty, courage and openness, so that the good news of the awesome love of God in Jesus Christ will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be shared far and wide. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray:

God of all goodness,
we bring our prayers for the world you love so much to you:

For those living in or fleeing from places of conflict,
bring safety and sanctuary.

For those coping with natural disasters and climate change,
bring renewal and revitalisation.

For those who have or who seek power and authority,
bring wisdom and humility.

For those struggling with the cost of living right now,
bring sustenance and transformation.

For those suffering discrimination and fearful for their futures,
bring justice and freedom.

For those looking ahead to new beginnings in coming weeks,
bring enthusiasm and reassurance.

For those unwell in body, mind or spirit this day,
bring healing and hope.

God of all goodness,
in quiet and stillness, we bring you our own needs...

Lord's Prayer

Blessing